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ABSTRACT

This brief discussion and report of research considers aspects of culture and religion and their influence on young children in Japan and Israel. The discussion of Japan traces the development of early childhood education from the beginning of the modern era to 1985. The discussion of Israel briefly traces population characteristics and educational development. A study conducted in Israel, comparing educational environments of Arab preschool children with Jewish counterparts in kibbutzim and out, was continued in two urban, Japanese kindergartens and a day nursery. Findings indicated that Israeli Jewish children received more enrichment than Israeli Arab children did. Bedouin children were poorest. In Japan, findings suggested material, rather than cultural, prosperity, communal sleeping arrangements which restrict the development of independence and self-confidence among Japanese children, and excessive involvement of Japanese mothers with their children, due to extensive father absence during the working day. Most Japanese and many Israeli kibbutzim are non-religious, while most Arabs are quite religious. Some Japanese send their children to Christian kindergartens to insure a good education at a reputable school, but do not want their children to become Christians. While the number of parents in both nations who want their children to finish college is increasing, the trend is much stronger in Japan than in Israel. (RH)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS OF PRE- SCHOOL CHILDREN IN JAPAN AND ISRAEL

By

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

The environment of young children is one of the most important factors in their growth. In my study, I would like to consider the aspects of culture and religion, and to presents a comparison of these aspects as they concern young children in Japan and Israel.

secondly, I would like to analyze the expectations of their parents in regard to their childrens' religious education.

It would give me great pleasure if through this study I could contribute to the understanding and friendship of those concerened with childhood education in both of these countries.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

JAPAN

Japan is a nation of primarily one race, with a population of 124 millions, surrounded by the sea, and consisting of four main islands. It did not have any contact with another country until the Meiji Restoration in 1867.

(EARLY KINDERGARTEN)

In an age which imported foreign ideas and modernization, after several attempts the first kindergarten was established in 1876, attached to the Tokyo Women's Normal School. It served as a model for kindergartens in Japan, and promoted their spreas. Frobel's Gabe and play were introduced there. Since it was a time when ordinary people did not feel any need for kindergarten education, children who attended kindergarten

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were primarily from the nobility or from upper class families.

After the 1890's public and private kindergartens sprang up gradually. The Christian kindergartens, with their training schools, formed one of the mainstreams of kindergarten education in Japan.

In 1899, the Ministry of Education passed the "Act of the Content and Facilities of Kindergarten Education." According to this statute, pre-school children above the age of three should go to kindergarten. There they could develop sound minds and bodies, cultivate good manners, and supplement their home education by the four educational methods of play, song, dialogue, and handicraft.

(THE NEW EDUCATION MOVEMENT)

The New Education Movement in Japan began in the 1890's, under the influence of the Americans, Stanley Hall and John Dewey. Under this system, classes were divided into 20-to-30-minute segments, and teachers taught whole classes at once with Gabe or other educational materials.

(LIBERAL EDUCATION SYSTEM)

In the 1910's, and the 1920's, a Liberal Education Movement revolted against this way of teaching. Under this system, the strictly-scheduled 20-minute classes were abolished, and instead, the freedom, interest, and character of the child was respected. Teachers tried to develop children's spontaneous activities through play and actual life experience.

In 1926, the Kindergarten Act was passed. At that time it was decided that the content of education should consist of play, song, observation, dialogue, and handicraft.

In 1937, however, the Council of Education announced its "Outline of Kindergarten Education." Health education and discipline were emphasized; kindergartens were considered to have the social function of improving home education. Worship of the Imperial family, flag raising, the national anthem, and group training, were introduced into kindergarten education, replacing the Liberal education system.

Near the end of the Second World War, when big cities were often attacked from the air, many kindergartens and day nurseries became wartime day care centers. After the end of the War, there was a postwar reform. In 1946 a new constitution was adopted, and the "Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Laws" was promulgated. It was declared that the aim of education was the full development of the personality, and the rearing of a people who were of sound mind and body, who would love truth and justice, and respect individual values. Kindergarten was included as the first level of the school system.

Thirty years have passed since that time. Kindergartens have spread, along with the growth of the economy and culture. The "Outline of Kindergarten Education" (1948) was revised as the "Guidelines for Kindergarten Education" in 1956, and again in 1964.

(DAY NURSERIES)

At the beginning of the 19th century, N.Sato(1769-1850), a scholar of farm administration, planned to rebuild the then-deteriorating sector. It was suggested that early childhood educational facilities, such as nursery schools and play centers, be built in the farm villages. Unfortunately, this was not realized.

Another abortive attempt was made in 1871 when a day care center called "American Woman's Home" was founded. It was soon closed, however. By 1882, kindergartens began to be built in many places. The Ministry of Education advised that simple facilities be built as kindergartens, in order to take care of poor children. At that time private day care centers and day nurseries for farmers' children began to open spontaneously during the busy farming season.

In the big cities, day nurseries for poor children were established in the 1890's. The Industrial Revolution had just begun, and a proletariat which moved from the farms to the cities created slums. Children in the slums created

considerable social problems, and so the day nurseries were called "slum kindergartens". There were many other facilities built about this time, but they were not called "kindergarten". The Ministry of Home Affairs organized them, and gave them national grants. This was the origin of the Futaba Kindergarten, founded in 1900, and later re-named Futaba Day Nursery in 1926. By 1926 there were 228 full-time private day nurseries.

After the Rice Riot of 1918, public day nurseries were established. The city of Osaka built houses for the poor with relief work funds. A new public day nursery was established, as well, in 1919, and was called the Takujisho Day Nursery. By 1926 there were 65 public day nurseries through Japan. Since then, public day nurseries have spread all over Japan, including such cities as Wakayama, Kyoto, Nagaya, Tokyo, Yokohama, and Kobe.

The original aim of day nurseries was to help working mothers. They opened early in the morning and closed in the evening. The content of their education was similar to that of kindergartens, since kindergartens had again been the model for the day nurseries. But this changed gradually, and developed its own characteristics.

According to the STANDARD OF CONTENT OF DAY NURSERIES IN TOKYO (1934), there were three areas: 1: Training for Daily Life; 2: Human Development; 3: health Development. This is what chiefly emphasized in day nurseries in the 1930's. The content was strongly influenced by the Ministry of Home Affairs; efforts to "maintain public peace and order". As a reaction to this, the Proletarian Day Nursery Movement began in 1931; but this came to an end very shortly.

In 1937, the Japanese-Chinese War began, to be followed by the Second World War. During the Second World War women were sent to factories, and the demand for day nurseries increased.

By the end of the War, day nurseries had been established in temples, shrines, libraries, and schools in many places in

Japan.

After the War, day nurseries were organized for the first time by the Child Welfare Law (1947). Since then, they have spread widely. The Child Welfare Law prescribes that day nurseries (facilities where infants may be cared for with the consent of their parents) be conducted by the principles of child welfare. In 1951 this law was revised, and the day nursery became the facility for infants who are lacking in familial care. In 1965, the Ministry of Health and Welfare set up standards for day nursery education, and clarified the standards for content of education in day nurseries.

By 1985 there were 15,211 Japanese kindergartens, including 48 national, 6,246 public, and 8,917 private ones. There were 22,906 day nurseries including 13,625 public and 9,281 private.

ISRAEL

Israel, in contrast with Japan, is a multi-racial country. Today, of a total population of 4,200,000, there are 3,000,000 Jews, and 1,200,000 Arabs, including 60,000 Beduin.

Until 1948, when Israel declared its independence, Jews did not have their own country, and were scattered throughout the world. In the 19th century, Israel was known as Palestine, and was under Turkish rule. The educational activity of the small Jewish society of that time was based upon traditional Jewish education ; and was of a religious nature.

Massive immigration into Israel began in 1880, motivated by the Zionist ideal. Many kinds of schools were established in accordance with this structural change. Help came from Jewish organizations and the Zionist movement throughout the world. In 1917, the British Army defeated the Turks, and the British acquired a mandate for Palestine under the League of Nations. Under the British, the elementary education system made remarkable progress. After 1948, Israel established an educational system from the kindergarten to the university. "Middle School" education, however, was chiefly for the rich;

and there were few technical schools. Education for five-year-olds in kindergarten was not compulsory.

Independence brought about a big change, both in the educational system, and in the curriculum. A school administration in a dependent society under the rule of another country is quite different from one in an independent country which has to think about the future of its people.

For some years after Independence, there were many difficulties, because of the lack of teachers and facilities, and because so many immigrants came into the country. After a while, however, these difficulties were overcome, and a new foundation was established.

In 1949, the national educational system was established legally. Through the Education Law of 1953, the 8-4 system (elementary and high school) was established. This was changed to the 6-3-3 system (elementary, middle school, and high school) in 1969. Co-education is the general rule, except for the National Religious stream, where boys and girls attend school separately.

The most serious problem in Israel today is the integration of Jews and Arabs. After the Six-Day-War of 1967, the country had to incorporate 600,000 Arabs, and the Government had problems of administration.

METHOD OF STUDY

From 1982-1983, I conducted research in Israel into a comparison of the educational environments of pre-school children. The objects of my investigation were children of Jews in Kibbutzim as compared to children not in kibbutzim, and of Arab pre-school children.

I classified them into six groups:

1. Kibbutz Society
 - a. Takam
 - b. Artzi
2. Non-kibbutz Society

- a. urban
- b. rural
- 3. Arab Society
 - a. Arab
 - b. Beduin

I presented a paper on this subject in 1984, entitled:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ISRAEL (VOL.XII Seiwa College Bulletin).

In 1985 I made an investigation in Japan similar to the one I had done previously in Israel, on the educational environment of pre-school children, and of parental expectations, in two kindergartens and a day nursery in Nishinomiya, a Japanese city of 400,000. I also investigated a day nursery in a suburb of Nishinomiya. The purpose of my investigation was to make a comparative study with my first research.

Investigations in both Israel and Japan were carried-out by means of a questionnaire, except for the Beduin, who are largely illiterate, and had to be interviewed personally.

My questionnaires covered the following items:

1. parents' age
2. number of children
3. their ages
4. the number of picture books they had
5. the frequency with which the children enjoyed the picture books with their parents
6. the number of toys
7. the frequency with which the children played with their parents
8. the number of musical instruments
9. the frequency with which the children enjoyed the musical instruments with their parents
10. the amount of sporting goods
11. the kind of sporting goods
12. whether there were separate rooms for children

13. with whom the children slept at night
14. the number of T.V. sets
15. the frequency with which children and parents watched T.V.together
16. the parents' religion
17. the parents' opinion of religious education
18. the parents' expectations in relation to educational goals for their children

RESULT

As a result, 147 responses were obtained in Israel and 393 in Japan. Being a foreigner in Israel, the investigation was accompanied with difficulty, since there were two questionnaires in two languages, Hebrew and Arabic. More than 80% were collected, however.

In summary, I would like to make the following observation: In general, Israeli Jewish children receive more enrichment than Arab children do. Beduin children are the poorest in the Arab group.

In Japan, there were no differences among the two kindergartens and two day centers which I investigated. Ninety percent of Japanese families have become middle class, and enjoy a materialistic life. There are many toys, musical instruments, and sports goods-- so much so, that parents are at a loss for what else to get for their children. On the other hand, children ask their parents for expensive goods, because of T.V.commercials, or because their friends have them. These phenomena are, however, not an evidence of cultural prosperity. Japanes life today has been so much Westernized that the traditional culture of Japan is not given much attention.

One of the things in Japan that can hardly by Westernized is the sleeping system. Land prices in Japan are very expensive, and not many people have spacious houses; but this has improved. Today they can afford individual rooms for

children, despite the fact that land prices are still high. Yet there are many children who do not sleep in their own rooms at night. Rather than sleeping individually, or with brothers and sisters, they are likely to sleep with adults. This not only prevents children from developing independence and self-confidence, but it also produces the phenomenon that the mother cares too much about her children, and she can not live without thinking about them. Japanese workaholic fathers leave home early in the morning and come home late at night. The mother is so lonely she comes to love the children too much. This is one of the biggest problems that Japanese society has today.

Now, let us consider the religious aspect.

In Israel, many kibbutzim are non-religious. This should be understood in the context of the motivation and process involved in the historical development of the kibbutzim. Most Arabs are quite religious. As a whole, people who are "non-religious" set more value on their children's independence and autonomous judgment.

There are many non-religious parents in Japan. Besides traditional religions like Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism, there are more than 3000 other religious groups recognized by the Government. The superficiality of traditional religions has caused many young people and young parents to become non-religious. Not only do they not belong to an organized religious group, they deny their children religious educations.

Although Japan is not a Christian country, there are about 1526 Christian-affiliated kindergartens. On the average, these kindergartens have 82 children, divided two or three classes. The reason there are so many Christian kindergartens in non-Christian Japan is that they have a reputation for good and conscientious education. Non-religious parents trust Christian kindergartens, and send their children there; but most of these do not want their children to become Christian.

Finally, let us consider the expectation of parents. As in the rest of the world, both in Japan and in Israel, the number of parents who want their children to finish a college or university course is increasing. This trend is much stronger in Japan than in Israel, however. This academic career is very important in Japan. Recruits to Japanese companies are expected to stay with them untill retirement; a graduate certificate from a good university means a good work place. Thus, education-oriented parents try very hard to send their children to a good kindergarten. Good kindergartens are the first step to good academic careers.

In my opinion, parents should consider that educational plans should depend upon each child's ability and personality; but this is theory; in actuality, it is not so easy to do.

Children in developing countries are not given a good educational environment, and receive a poor education; but their faces are shining when they are absorbed in play. On the other hand, Japanese children are given a good educational environment, and the opportunity for an academic career-- but they are not enjoying themselves at school.

Both in Israel or in Japan, it is our responsibility, as educators to seek a better quality of life for children, for their happiness as tomorrow's adults.